

**Testimony of Kevin O'Flaherty**  
**Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids**  
**Submitted to Senator Jonathan Harris, Representative Elizabeth Ritter**  
**and Members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly**  
**February 27, 2009**

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter, and other members of the Committee,

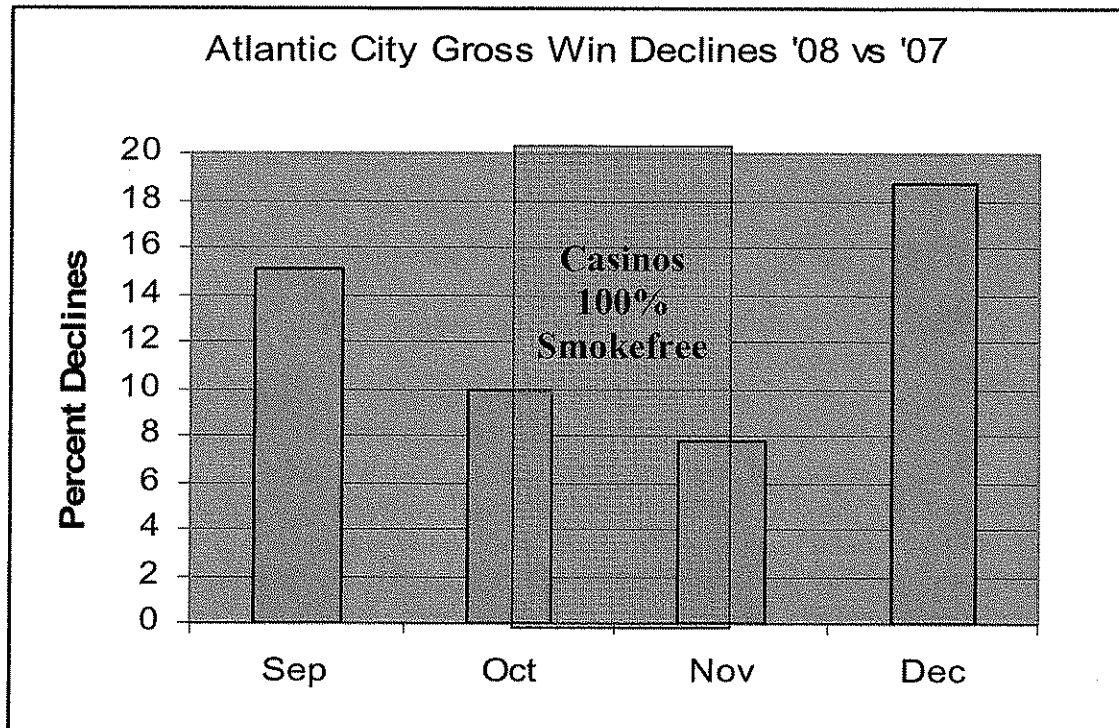
It is my pleasure to be able to present testimony to you today regarding the need to eliminate secondhand smoke at Connecticut's two casinos.

I'm not sure there is any need to document the negative health effects of second hand smoke for you today. The other testimony has made that clear and you've heard the Surgeon General's report documenting that there is no safe level of second-hand smoke exposure. There also shouldn't be a need to try and convince you that the public supports and demands smokefree laws that protect all workers. Connecticut has had a smokefree law for several years that has been overwhelmingly supported by the residents of the state. You also have testimony from Larry Schoen, an Engineer who is an ASHRAE Fellow, specifically sharing ASHRAE's determination that ventilation systems cannot mitigate the health hazards of secondhand smoke, even if they can make the air seem less offensive to the human eyes, nose and throat.

It seems the only reason we haven't already protected these workers is a fear that the tribes who operate the casinos and the state might lose money from a decrease in business if the casinos become smokefree. The mis-information campaigns have been going full-steam ahead, playing into everyone's fears of the bad economy getting worse, possible lost jobs, and ever-mounting state deficits. The New London Day reported earlier this week on a 100% smoking ban in Atlantic City's casinos saying that it was: "Enacted by the city council, it took effect Oct. 15 and allowed casinos to provide enclosed, ventilated smoking lounges for gamblers. Less than two weeks later, the council voted to revert to the partial ban amid a precipitous decline in casino business."

The only problem with this statement is that it's factually untrue. The Atlantic City council, at the urging of the casino industry, introduced an ordinance to rescind the smokefree casino ordinance on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1 week before the ordinance was scheduled to take effect on October 15<sup>th</sup>. Casino revenues had already been declining all year, due to the economy and the 6 new casinos in Pennsylvania. Reacting to fear, not revenue declines, the council voted to delay implementation of the law for at least a year. The problem was that the ordinance would take a second reading to pass, and then 20 days to go into effect. So Atlantic City had 100% smokefree casinos for approximately 1 month from October 15<sup>th</sup> to November 17<sup>th</sup>.

So what actually happened with casino revenues in Atlantic City last fall while the casinos were yelling that the sky would fall and the city council put a fear of job loss ahead of worker's health and safety?



I'd love to tell you that revenues shot through the roof. Unfortunately, that was not the case. They did, however, increase. The graph above shows that while revenue declines in September and December were 15 and 18 percent, respectively, the declines in October and November were 9.9 and 7.8 percent. And what did the casinos do to show their gratitude to the council for rescinding the ban? They laid-off hundreds of workers anyway in December, because the real factor affecting their revenue had not changed... the national economy.

You see the same story across the country when you look at casino revenues. In Illinois, where revenue declines have been 23% in 2008, the industry blames a 100% smoking ban. In Las Vegas, where all casinos allow smoking everywhere, they have seen declines of over 26% in 2008. All states have seen declines in gaming revenue over the last year, and there's no discernable pattern that shows states with smokefree casinos are losing more money than states that do not protect their workers. In fact, some smokefree states are actually doing better than their counterparts that still allow smoking.

So once you remove the smokescreen that the industry puts up regarding revenue declines and threats of job-loss, what do you have? You have the one thing that all sides in this debate agree on. Secondhand smoke harms worker's health, sometimes causing death. Every worker in Connecticut deserves a healthy workplace, regardless of any potential cost to the employer, the community, or the state. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids strongly supports legislation, compacts, or changes in tribal law that would protect all workers in Connecticut's casinos from secondhand smoke. The only way you can accomplish that is by creating 100% smokefree casinos, with no exceptions, as quickly as possible.

Thank you.